

form. The fact that those who were once mortal enemies are now on speaking terms, that the most fiercely opposed ideologies 'enter into dialogue', that a kind of peaceful coexistence has set in at all levels, that morality is less strict than it was, in no sense signifies some 'humanist' progress in human relations, a greater understanding of problems or any such airy nonsense. It indicates simply that, since ideologies, opinions, virtues and vices are ultimately merely material for exchange and communication, all contradictory elements are equivalent in the play of signs. Tolerance in this context is no longer either a psychological trait or a virtue: *it is a modality of the system itself*. It is like the total compatibility and elasticity of the elements of fashion: long skirts and mini-skirts 'tolerate' each other very well (indeed they signify nothing other than the relationship which holds between them).

Tolerance connotes morally the generalized relativity of functions/ signs, objects/signs, beings/signs, relations/signs, ideas/signs. In fact, we are beyond the opposition between fanaticism and tolerance, as we are beyond that between sincerity and fakery. 'Moral' tolerance is no greater than it was before. We have simply changed systems; we have moved on to functional compatibility.

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11: Anomie in the Affluent Society

Violence

The consumer society is at one and the same time a society of solicitude and a society of repression, a pacified society and a society of violence. We have seen that 'pacified' daily life thrives on a daily diet of consumed violence, 'allusive' violence: news reports of accidents, murders, revolutions, the atomic or bacteriological threat -- the whole apocalyptic stock-in-trade of the mass media. We have seen that the affinity between violence and the obsession with security and well-being is not accidental: 'spectacular' violence and the pacification of daily life are homogeneous, because they are each equally abstract and each is a thing of myths and signs. We might also add that violence is now a days inoculated into daily life in homoeopathic doses -- a vaccine against fatality -- to ward off the spectre of the *real* fragility of that pacified life. For it is no longer the spectre of scarcity which haunts the civilization of affluence, but the spectre of **fragility**. And that spectre, which is much more menacing because it concerns the very equilibrium of individual and collective structures, and which has to be warded off at all costs, is in fact kept at bay by this round about solution of consumed, packaged, homogenized violence. This violence is not dangerous violence: blood on the front page no more compromises the social and moral order than does sex (despite the emotional blackmail on the part of the censors who wish to persuade themselves of this, and to persuade us of it). It simply attests to the fact that the balance is a precarious one, that the social and moral order is made up of contradictions.

The real problem of violence arises elsewhere. It is the problem of the *real*, uncontrollable violence secreted by plenty and security once a certain threshold has been reached. This is no longer integrated violence, consumed with the rest, but the uncontrollable violence which well-being secretes in its very achievement. That violence is characterized (precisely like consumption as we have defined it, though not as superficially understood) by the fact that it is *aimless and objectless*. [114](#) It is because we base our lives on the traditional idea of the pursuit of well-being as a *rational* activity that the eruptive, unaccountable violence of the Stockholm youth gangs, of the Montreal riots, of the Los Angeles murderers, seems an incredible, incomprehensible manifestation and one which stands in apparent contradiction to social progress and affluence. It

is because we base our lives on the *moral* illusion of the conscious

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finality of all things, of the basic rationality of individual and collective choices (the whole system of values rests on this: there is in the consumer an absolute instinct which inclines him by essence towards his preferential ends -- the *moral* myth of consumption which is the direct heir to the idealist myth of man as naturally inclined towards the Beautiful and the Good), that this violence seems unspeakable to us, absurd, diabolical. Now, perhaps it quite simply means that something far exceeds the conscious objectives of satisfaction and well-being by which this society justifies itself (in its own eyes) or, rather, by which it reinstates itself within the norms of conscious rationality. In this sense, this unexplained violence must cause us to reassess all our thinking on affluence: affluence and violence go together; they have to be analysed together.

The more general problem of which this 'objectless' violence is a part, a violence which is as yet sporadic in certain countries, but virtually endemic in all developed or over developed countries, is that of the *fundamental contradictions of affluence* (and not just its sociological disparities). It is the problem of the multiple forms of **anomie** (to use Durkheim's term) or of **anomaly**, depending on whether we look at them in terms of the rationality of institutions or the lived evidence of normality -- forms which run from *destructiveness* (violence, delinquency), through collective escapist behaviour (drugs, hippies, nonviolence), to contagious *depressiveness* (fatigue, suicide, neuroses). Each of these characteristic aspects of the 'affluent' or 'permissive' society raises in its way the problem of a fundamental imbalance.

It is not easy to adapt to affluence, say Galbraith and the 'strategists of desire': 'our economic attitudes are rooted in the poverty, inequality, and economic peril of the past' (or in centuries of puritan morality in which humanity lost the habit of happiness). 115 This difficulty of living in affluence should itself show us, if such a demonstration were needed, that the alleged 'naturalness' of the desire for well-being is not so natural as all that. Otherwise, individuals would not have so much trouble getting used to it; they would embrace plenty with open arms. This should indicate to us that there is in consumption something quite different, and perhaps even something opposite: something for which people have to be educated, trained, even tamed. It should tell us that there is here, in fact, a new system of moral and psychological constraints which has nothing to do with the realm of freedom. The vocabulary of the neo-philosophers of desire is significant in this connection. According to them, it is a question simply of *teaching* people to be happy, of teaching them to *devote* themselves to happiness, of creating within them the *reflexes* of happiness. Affluence is not, then, a paradise. It is not a leap beyond morality into the ideal immorality of plenty. It is a new objective situation governed by a new morality. Objectively speaking, it is not therefore an advance, but quite simply *something different*.

There is, then, this ambiguity about affluence: it is always simultaneously experienced as euphoric myth (of resolution of tensions and

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conflicts, of happiness beyond history and morality) and *endured* as a process of more or less enforced adaptation to new types of behaviour, collective constraints and norms. The 'Revolution of Affluence' does not usher in the ideal society; it simply leads into a different type of society.

Our moralists would like to reduce this social problem to one of 'mentalities'. So far as they are concerned, the key shift has already occurred: real affluence is here and we simply have to move from a mentality of scarcity to a mentality geared to affluence. And they deplore how difficult this is and are horrified to see forms of *resistance to plenty* emerging. However, one has only to accept for a moment that affluence itself is merely (or is *also*) a system of constraints of a new type to understand immediately that the new (more or less unconscious) social constraint must be accompanied by a new type of demand for freedom. In the event, this takes the form of a rejection of the 'consumer society' in violent and Erostratic [116](#) form (the blind destruction of material and cultural goods) or non-violent, abdicationist form (refusal to engage in it through either production or consumption). If affluence were freedom, then this violence would indeed be unthinkable. If affluence (growth) is constraint, then that violence is easy to understand; it follows *logically*. If it is wild, objectless, formless, this is because the constraints it is contesting are themselves also unformulated, unconscious, illegible: they are the very constraints of 'freedom', of controlled accession to happiness, of the totalitarian ethic of affluence.

This sociological interpretation leaves space for (I even believe it connects at a deep level with) a psychoanalytic interpretation of these apparently aberrant phenomena of the 'rich' societies. The moralists we have referred to, who also regard themselves as psychologists, all speak of *guilt*. By this they always mean a residual guilt, a hang over from puritan times, which, in terms of their logic, must now be on the decline. 'We are not yet ready for happiness.' 'The prejudices which do us so much harm.' Now it is clear that this guilt (let us accept the term) is, on the contrary, increasing as our affluence progresses. A gigantic process of primitive accumulation of anxiety, guilt and rejection runs parallel to the process of expansion and satisfaction and it is this source of discontent which fuels the violent, impulsive subversion of -- and murderous 'acting-out' against -- the very order of happiness. It is not therefore the past and tradition or any other of the stigmata of original sin which cause human beings, rendered fragile by happiness, to become uneasy in a state of affluence and, on occasion, to rise up against it. Even though that old burden is still there, it is no longer the key factor. Guilt, 'malaise' and profound incompatibilities are at the heart of the *current* system itself, and are produced by it in the course of its *logical* development.

Forced to adapt to the **principle of need**, to the **principle of utility** (the principle of economic reality) or, in other words, to the ever full and *positive* correlation between a product of some kind (object, good or

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service) and a satisfaction through the one being indexed to the other; forced into this concerted, unilateral and ever positive finality, *the whole of the negativity of desire*, the other side of **ambivalence**, and hence all the things which do not fit into this positive vision, *are rejected, censored by satisfaction itself* (which is not enjoyment [*jouissance*]: enjoyment, for its part, is ambivalent), and, no longer finding any possible outlet, crystallize into a gigantic fund of anxiety. [117](#)

This explains the basic problem of violence in the affluent society (and, indirectly, all the symptoms of anomaly, depression or abdication). That violence, which is radically different from the violence engendered by poverty, scarcity and exploitation, is the emergence, in action, of the negativity of desire which is omitted, occulted, censored by the total positivity of need. It is the opposite mode of the ambivalence which resurfaces at the very heart of the smug equivalence of man and his environment in satisfaction. It is -- against the imperative of productivity/

consummativity -- the emergence of *destructiveness* (the death drive) for which there can be no bureaucratic reception structures, since these would then become a part of a process of planned satisfaction and, hence, a system of positive institutions. [118](#) We shall see, however, that, just as there are models of consumption, so society suggests or sets up 'models of violence' through which it seeks to tap, control and massmediafy these irruptive forces.

Indeed, in order to prevent this fund of anxiety, accumulated as a result of the *breakdown of the ambivalent logic of desire* and hence of the *loss of the symbolic function*, from resulting in that uncontrollable, anomic violence, society acts at two levels:

1 On the one hand, it attempts to diminish this anxiety by the proliferation of caring agencies: innumerable collective services, roles and functions are created; soothing, guilt-dispelling balm and smiles are injected into the system -- psychological lubricants, not unlike the cleansing agents in washing powder. Enzymes gobbling up anxiety. And tranquillizers, relaxants, hallucinogens and therapies of all kinds are also on sale. An endless task, in which *the affluent society, the provider of satisfaction without end, exhausts its resources producing the antidote to the anxiety generated by that satisfaction*. An increasingly large budget goes into consoling the beneficiaries of the miracle of affluence for their anxious satisfaction. We may liken this to the economic deficit (which is not in fact calculable) created by the disbenefits of growth (pollution, built-in obsolescence, crowding, scarcity of natural resources), but it undoubtedly exceeds that by a very long way.

2 Society may try -- and does try systematically -- to claw back that anxiety as a means of stimulating consumption, or to claw back the guilt and the violence in their turn as consumable goods or distinctive cultural signs. There is, then, an intellectual luxury of guilt characteristic of certain groups, a 'guilt exchange-value'. Or, alternatively, the cultural malaise [119](#) is offered for consumption like everything else; it is resocialized

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as a cultural commodity and an object of collective delectation, which merely leads more deeply into anxiety, since this cultural metaconsumption is tantamount to a new censorship and starts the process off again. At any event, violence and guilt are mediated here by cultural *models* and turn back into the consumed violence we discussed at the beginning of this chapter.

These two control mechanisms have powerful effects, but they are not, however, capable of forestalling the critical process of the turning -- the subversive conversion -- of affluence into violence. And it is useless to hold forth and gripe on, as *all* the critics do, about this 'inevitability' of violence, the 'unstoppable spiral', the possible social and moral solutions or, on the other hand, about paternalistic permissiveness ('young people have to have an outlet for their energies'). Some will look back longingly to the days 'when violence had a meaning', the good old violence of war, patriotism, passion and, ultimately, rationality -- violence sanctioned by an objective or a cause, ideological violence or the individual violence of the rebel, which was still of the order of individual aestheticism and could be regarded as one of the fine arts. People will go on trying to fit this new violence into old models and apply known treatments to it. But we have to see that this violence, which is no longer strictly historical, no longer sacred, ritualistic or ideological -- nor yet again, for all that, pure act or expression of individual singularity -- is structurally linked to affluence. This is why it is irreversible, always imminent and so fascinating to everyone, whatever their explicit attitudes to it: this is because it is rooted in the very process of growth and increased satisfaction in which everyone is now involved. From time to time, within

our closed universe of consumed quietude and violence, this new violence very briefly takes over *for everyone* a part of the lost symbolic function, before resolving back into a consumer object.

Serge Lentz (on *The Chase*): `The last scenes of the film are so savage that, for the first time in my life, my hands were shaking as I left the cinema. In the New York theatres where the film is currently showing, these same scenes spark incredible reactions. When Marlon Brando throws himself on a man, wild, hysterical members of the audience jump up screaming "Kill him! kill him!"'

July 1966: Richard Speck breaks into a nurses' home in Chicago's south side. He binds and gags eight young women all aged about 20. Then he executes them one by one by stabbing or strangulation.

August 1966: C.J. Whitman, an architecture student at the University of Austin, Texas, sets himself up with a dozen guns on a 300-foot block overlooking the university campus and starts shooting: 13 dead, 31 injured.

Amsterdam, June 1966: For the first time since the war, there was fighting of extraordinary violence for several days in the very heart of

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the city. The Telegraaf building was stormed. Lorries were burned, windows smashed, hoardings torn down. Thousands of demonstrators running rampant. Millions of florins' worth of damage. One dead, some 10 injured. The revolt of the `Provos'.

Montreal, October 1969: Grave disorder broke out on Tuesday following a strike of policemen and fire fighters. Two hundred taxi drivers ransacked the premises of a transport company. Shots were fired and two people were killed. After that attack, 1,000 young people descended on the city centre, smashing shop-windows and looting. There were 10 bank raids, 19 armed attacks, three terrorist explosions and a host of burglaries. Given the scale of these events, the government put the army on standby and passed an emergency law conscripting police officers.

The murder at the Polanski villa: five persons of varying degrees of celebrity killed at a villa in the Los Angeles hills, including the wife of Polanski, a director of sado-fantastic films. A murder of idols exemplary because, by a kind of fanatical irony, it lent material form, in the very details of the murder and its staging, to some of the characteristics of the films which had won fame and success for the victims. And interesting because it illustrated the paradox of that violence: both savage (irrational, with no obvious objective) and ritualistic (indexed to spectacular models imposed by the mass media -- in this case, Polanski's very own films). Like the Austin murder, this was not a crime of passion, not committed by the criminal underworld or done for gain; it lay outside the traditional criteria of the legal system or of individual responsibility. Mindless, unreflected murders and yet *'reflected' in advance* (here, astonishingly, to the point of precise imitation) *by mass-media models*, and being reflected along this same route in similar murders or forms of *'actingout'* (cf. also suicides by fire). This alone defines them: their spectacular connotation as news items, such that they are conceived from the outset as film scenarios or as reportage, and their desperate attempt in pushing back the limits of violence to be *'irrecuperable'*, to transgress and smash that mass-media order, to which they are in fact party even in their asocial vehemence.

Subculture of Non-Violence

Indissociable from these new-style phenomena of violence, though formally opposed to them, are the modern manifestations of non-violence. From LSD to flower-power, psychedelia to hippies, zen to pop music, all have in common the rejection of socialization through status and the principle of productivity, the rejection of this whole contemporary liturgy of affluence, social success and gadgetry. Whether this rejection paints itself as violent or non-violent, it is always the rejection of the activism of the society of growth, of enforced well-being as the new repressive order. In this sense, violence and non-violence, like all anomic

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phenomena, have a litmus function. This society which gives itself out to be, and sees itself as, hyperactive and pacified is revealed by the beats and the rockers on the one hand, and the hippies on the other, to be characterized at a deep level by *passivity* and *violence*. The one group lays hold of the latent violence of this society and turns that violence against it, taking it to extremes. The other group extends the secret, orchestrated passivity of this society (behind its façade of hyperactivity) into a practice of abdication and total asociality, thus causing that society to deny itself, in accordance with its own logic.

Let us leave aside here all the Christic, Buddhist, lamaistic themes of Love, Awakening and Heaven on earth, the Hindu litanies and total tolerance. The question would seem rather to be the following: do the hippies and their community represent a real alternative to the processes of growth and consumption? Are they not merely the inverted and complementary image of those processes? Are they an 'anti-society', ultimately capable of overturning the whole social order, or are they merely a decadent outgrowth of that order -- or even simply one of the many versions of the visionary sects which have always cast themselves out of the world in order imperatively to bring about the earthly paradise? Here again, we must not mistake the mere metamorphosis of an order for its subversion.

We want to have time for living and loving. The flowers, the beards, the long hair and the drugs are secondary ... Being 'hip' first and foremost means being a friend to humanity. Someone who tries to take a fresh, non-hierarchical look at the world: a non-violent person, who respects and loves life. Someone who has true values and a true sense of proportion, who puts freedom before authority and creation before production, who values cooperation and non-competition competition ... Just someone kind and open who avoids doing others harm. That's the main thing.

Or again:

As a general rule, doing what you think is right whenever and wherever it may be, without worrying about approval or disapproval, on the sole express condition that it causes no harm or offence to anyone.

The hippies immediately made headlines in the West. With its fondness for primitive societies, the consumer society immediately seized on them as part of its folklore, like a strange, inoffensive flora. Are they not ultimately, from a sociological point of view, merely a luxury product of rich societies? Are not they, with their orientalist spirituality, their gaudy psychedelia, also marginals who merely exacerbate certain traits of their society?

They are, or remain, conditioned by the basic mechanisms of that society. Their asociality is communal, tribal. We may speak, in their regard, of McLuhan's 'tribalism', that resurrection on a planetary scale, under the aegis of the mass media, of the oral, tactile, musical mode of communication which was that of archaic cultures before the visual,

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typographical era of the Book. They advocate the abolition of competition, of the defensive system and functions of the ego. But this is merely to translate into more or less mystical terms what has already been described by Riesman as 'other-directedness', an objective evolution of personal character structure (organized around the ego and the superego) towards a group 'ambience' in which everything comes from, and is directed towards, others. The hippies' mode of guileless emotional transparency is reminiscent of the imperative of sincerity, openness and 'warmth' of the 'peer group'. As for the regression and infantilism which constitute the seraphic, triumphant charm of the hippie communities, these needless to say merely reflect, in glorificatory mode, the irresponsibility and infantilism to which modern society confines each of its individuals. In short, the 'Human', almost hounded out of existence by productivist society and the obsession with social standing, celebrates its *sentimental resurrection* in the hippie community, where, beneath the apparent total anomie, all the dominant structural features of the mainstream society persist.

Writing of American youth, Riesman, referring to the cultural models defined by Margaret Mead, speaks of a 'Kwakiutl' style and a 'Pueblo' style. The Kwakiutl are violent, agonistic, competitive and rich, and engage in unrestrained consumption in the potlatch. The Pueblos are gentle, kind and inoffensive; they live frugally and are content to do so. Our current society can thus be defined by the formal opposition between a dominant culture which is one of unrestrained, ritualistic, conformist consumption, a culture which is violent and competitive (the potlatch of the Kwakiutl) and a permissive, euphoric, 'drop-out' subculture of the hippie/Pueblo type. But everything indicates that, just as violence is immediately reabsorbed into 'models of violence', the contradiction here resolves itself into functional coexistence. The extreme of acceptance and the extreme of rejection here meet up, as on a Moebius strip by means of a simple twist. And the two models ultimately develop in concentric zones around the same axis of the social order. John Stuart Mill put it brutally: 'In this age, the mere example of non-conformity, the mere refusal to bend the knee to custom, is itself a *service*.' [120](#)

Fatigue

Just as there is a world hunger problem, so there is now also a worldwide problem of fatigue. Paradoxically, the two are mutually exclusive: endemic, irrepressible fatigue -- like the irrepressible violence we have discussed above -- is the prerogative of rich societies and is a product of, among other things, the overcoming of hunger and endemic scarcity which remains the major problem for pre-industrial societies. Fatigue, as a collective syndrome of the post-industrial societies, thus represents one of the profound anomalies, one of the 'dysfunctions' of prosperity. As a new *mal du siècle*, it should be analysed in conjunction

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with the other phenomena of anomie, whose recrudescence marks our age, at a time when such problems ought in fact to be disappearing.

Just as the new violence is 'objectless', so this fatigue is 'groundless'. It has nothing to do with muscular fatigue or lack of energy. It does not arise from physical exertion. There is, of course, much spontaneous talk of 'nervous strain', of 'depression' and psychosomatic illness. This kind of explanation is now part of mass culture: it is in all the newspapers (and all the conferences). Everyone can fall back on this, as though it were something that could now be taken for granted, and can hence derive gloomy pleasure from being a martyr to their nerves. Admittedly, this fatigue signifies one thing at least (in this respect it has the same revelatory function as violence and non-violence): this society which claims to be -- which regards itself as being -- in constant progress towards the abolition of effort, the resolution of tension, greater ease of living and automation, is in fact a society of stress, tension and drug use, in which the overall balance sheet of satisfaction is increasingly in deficit, in which individual and collective equilibrium is being progressively compromised even as the technical conditions for its realization are being increasingly fulfilled.

The heroes of consumption are tired. Various interpretations for this may be advanced on the psycho-sociological level. Instead of equalizing opportunities and reducing social competition (economic and status competition), the consumption process makes competition more violent and more acute in all its forms. Only in the consumer age are we at last in a society of generalized, *totalitarian* competition, which operates at all levels -- the economy, knowledge, desire, the body, signs and drives. These are all things which are now *produced* as exchange-value in an endless process of differentiation and super-differentiation.

We may also take it, with Chombart de Lauwe, that, rather than matching up 'aspirations, needs and satisfactions' as it claims to do, this society creates ever greater disparities both among individuals and among social groups who are wrestling, on the one hand, with the imperative of competition and upward social mobility and, on the other, with the -- now highly internalized -- imperative to maximalize their pleasures. Under so many opposing constraints, the individual comes apart. The social discrepancy of inequalities is added to the internal discrepancy between needs and aspirations to make this society one that is increasingly at odds with itself, disunited, suffering from a 'malaise'. Fatigue (or 'asthenia') will then be interpreted as a response on the part of modern man -- a response in the form of a passive refusal -- to his conditions of existence. But it has to be seen that this 'passive refusal' is in fact a *latent violence*, and that it is, by this token, only one possible response, the others being responses of *overt violence*. Here again, we have to restore the principle of ambivalence. Fatigue, depression, neurosis are always convertible into overt violence, and vice versa. The fatigue of the citizen of post-industrial society is not far removed from

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the 'go-slow' or 'slowdown' of factory workers, or the schoolchild's 'boredom'. These are all forms of passive resistance; they are 'ingrowing' in the way one speaks of an 'ingrowing toenail', turning back in towards the flesh, towards the inside.

In fact, we must reverse all the terms of the spontaneous view: fatigue is not passivity set against the social hyperactivity outside. It is, rather, *the only form of activity* which can, in certain conditions, be set against the constraint of general passivity which applies in current social relations. The tired pupil is the one who passively goes along with what the teacher says. The tired worker or bureaucrat is the one who has had all responsibility taken from him in his work. Political 'indifference', that catatonia of the modern citizen, is the indifference of the individual deprived of any decision-making powers and left only with the sop of universal suffrage. And the

physical and mental monotony of work on the production line or in the office plays its part, too: the muscular, vascular, physiological catalepsy of positions imposed (both standing and seated), of stereotyped gestures, of all the inertia of the chronic underemployment of the body in our society. But this is not the essential point, and this is why 'pathological' fatigue will not be cured by sport and muscular exercise as naïve specialists contend (any more than it will by stimulants or tranquillizers). For fatigue is a concealed form of protest, which turns round against oneself and 'grows into' one's own body because, in certain conditions, that is the only thing on which the dispossessed individual can take out his frustration, just as the blacks rebelling in the cities of America begin by burning down their own neighbourhoods. *True passivity is to be found in the joyful conformity to the system* of the 'dynamic' young manager, bright-eyed and broad-shouldered, ideally fitted to continual activity. Fatigue is an activity, a latent, endemic revolt, unconscious of itself. This explains its function: the 'slowdown', in all its forms, is (like neurosis) the only way to avoid total, genuine breakdown. And it is because it is a (latent) activity that it can suddenly go over into open revolt, as the month of May [1968] everywhere showed. The spontaneous, total contagion, the 'powderkeg' of the May movement can only be explained by this hypothesis: what was taken for lifelessness, disaffection and generalized passivity was in fact a potential of forces *active* in their very resignation, in their ebbing -- and hence immediately available. There was no miracle. And the ebbing since May is not an inexplicable 'reversal' of the process either. It is the *conversion* of a form of open revolt into a modality of latent *protest* (the term '*protest*' should indeed be applied only to this latter form: it refers to the many forms of refusal cut off momentarily from a practice of radical change).

Having said this, the fact remains that, in order to grasp the meaning of fatigue, we have to resituate it, beyond psycho-sociological interpretations, in the general structure of depressive states. Insomnia, headaches, migraines, pathological obesity or anorexia, atony or compulsive

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hyperactivity: though formally different or opposed, these symptoms can in reality be *interchanged*, can substitute one for another, somatic 'conversion' being always accompanied, and even defined by, the virtual 'convertibility' of all symptoms. Now -- this is the crucial point -- this logic of depressiveness (namely that, being no longer linked to organic lesions or real dysfunctions, symptoms 'wander around') echoes the very logic of consumption (namely that, being no longer linked to the objective function of objects, needs and satisfactions succeed one another, link up one to another, substitute one for another on the basis of a fundamental dissatisfaction). It is the same elusive, unlimited character, the same systematic convertibility which regulates the flow of needs and the 'fluidity' of depressive symptoms. We shall turn once again here to the principle of ambivalence, which we have already mentioned in connection with violence, to sum up the total, structural interrelatedness of the system of consumption and the system of abreaction/somatization (of which fatigue is merely one aspect). All the processes of our societies tend towards a deconstruction, a dissociation of the ambivalence of desire. That ambivalence, totalized in *jouissance* and the symbolic function, is split apart, but, in going off in two different directions, it obeys a single logic: all the positivity of desire passes into the series of needs and satisfactions, where it resolves itself in terms of managed aims; all the negativity of desire, however, passes into uncontrollable somatization or into the acting-out of violence. This explains the profound unity of the whole process: no other hypothesis can account for the multiplicity of disparate phenomena (affluence, violence, euphoria, depression) which, taken together, characterize the 'consumer society' and which we sense are all necessarily inter-linked, though their logic remains inexplicable within the perspective of a classical anthropology.

Though this is not the place to do it, we ought to go further into:

1 the analysis of consumption as a general process of 'conversion', or, in other words, of 'symbolic' transfer of a lack to a whole chain of signifiers/objects successively invested as part-objects;

2 generalizing the theory of the part-object to the processes of somatization -- here again a symbolic transfer and an investment -- on the basis of a theory of the body and its status as object within the system of modernity. We have seen that this theory of the body is essential to the theory of consumption, the body being an epitome of all these ambivalent processes: both invested narcissistically as an object of eroticized solicitude and invested 'somatically' as an object of concern and aggressivity.

'It's absolutely classic,' comments a specialist in psychosomatic illness. 'You take refuge in your headaches. It could be anything else at all, such as colitis, insomnia, various kinds of pruritus or eczema, sexual difficulties, obesity, respiratory, digestive or cardiovascular problems ... or quite simply, and indeed most often, insurmountable *fatigue*.'

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Significantly, depression comes to the surface at the point where one is released from the constraints of work and where the time for satisfaction begins (or should begin) -- the managing director with migraines from Friday night to Monday morning; suicide or death following hard upon retirement, etc. It is very well known too that, beneath the now institutional, ritual demand for free time, the 'age of leisure' has seen the development of a growing demand for work, for activity, a compulsive need to 'be doing' or 'acting' in which our pious moralists immediately saw a proof that work was man's 'natural vocation'. It seems more likely that this non-economic demand for work is an expression of all the aggressivity that has not been satisfied in leisure and satisfaction. But it can find no resolution by that route since, arising from the depths of the ambivalence of desire, it here reformulates itself as a demand or a 'need' for work and thus re-enters the cycle of needs, from which we know there is no way out for desire.

Just as violence can be turned to domestic use, to heighten the enjoyment of security, so fatigue, like neurosis, can become a cultural trait of distinction. Then the whole ritual of fatigue and satisfaction comes into play, most often among the cultivated and the privileged (though this cultural 'alibi' is filtering down very quickly). At this stage, fatigue is no longer anomic at all, and nothing of what we have just said of it applies to this 'obligatory' fatigue: this is 'consumed' fatigue and forms part of the social ritual of exchange and status.

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Conclusion: On Contemporary Alienation or the End of the Pact with the Devil

The Student of Prague

The *Student of Prague* is an old silent film from the 1930s, an expressionist film of the German school. [121](#) It tells the story of a poor but ambitious student impatient for a more prosperous life. As he is taking part in a drinking bout in a café near Prague, a hunt is in progress all around in which that city's high society is finding what amusement it can. Someone rules over that society and is pulling the strings. He can be seen manoeuvring the animals at will and regulating the